

ACBL E-Z Guide

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Bidding

in the
21st Century

AMERICAN CONTRACT BRIDGE LEAGUE
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HOW TO VALUE YOUR HAND

Tricks are taken with high cards and low cards in long suits. Hand valuation takes both into consideration. The features of your hand are assigned points and these are totaled to give an estimate of the strength of your hand.

HIGH-CARD POINTS:

Points are assigned for each of the four highest cards in a suit. These are referred to as high-card points or HCP.

Ace	4 points
King	3 points
Queen	2 points
Jack	1 point

DISTRIBUTION POINTS:

Distribution points are assigned for each suit of five cards or longer, with one point for every card more than four.

five-card suit	1 point
six-card suit	2 points
seven-card suit	3 points
eight-card suit	4 points

HOW TO VALUE YOUR HAND, cont.

DUMMY POINTS:

Count for short suits only if a good trump fit has been found (eight-card or longer fit) and you are valuing your hand as dummy for a contract played in your partner's suit. Use dummy points instead of distribution points for length when raising partner's suit.

void	5 points
singleton	3 points
doubleton	1 point

THE GOLDEN RULES

THE GAME BONUS:

How many points in the combined partnership hands are needed for you to take enough tricks to make a game contract?

5♦ or 5♣ (minor suits)	29 combined points
4♠ or 4♥ (major suits)	25 combined points
3NT	25 combined points

THE GOLDEN FIT:

There are two parts to making a bid — the level and the strain. The level is determined by the combined strength of the partnership hands. The strain represents a choice to play in a trump suit or in notrump. When you and your partner have at least eight combined cards in a suit, think of it as a Golden Fit. If you don't have an eight-card or longer fit, you generally want to play in notrump.

THE GOLDEN RULES, cont.

PARTSCORES AND THE GOLDEN FIT:

If you have fewer than 25 combined points, you do not have enough strength for a game contract, so you want to play in the best partscore contract. If you have a Golden Fit, play in that suit at as low a level as possible.

GAMES AND THE GOLDEN FIT:

With 25 or more combined points and a Golden Fit in a major suit, bid four of the major (4♥ or 4♠). Often the partnership has 25 combined points with a Golden Fit in clubs or diamonds. Since the partnership may not be able to take the 11 tricks for a minor-suit game, you should ignore the Golden Fit in the minor to play 3NT. The three Golden Games are 4♠, 4♥ and 3NT.

THE ROLES OF THE PARTNERS

You and your partner work together, through the bidding, to discover whether you have enough strength and the right distribution to bid for one of the Golden Game bonuses. Each player has a role.

THE OPENER:

The partner who opens the bidding gets the first opportunity to provide information to the partnership. The opener tells partner something about both the strength and distribution of opener's hand. As the describer, the opening bidder starts to paint a picture of the hand for partner.

THE RESPONDER:

The partner of the opening bidder is the responder. Having heard partner start to describe opener's hand, the responder can guide the partnership to its best contract. The responder is sometimes referred to as the captain; the captain usually determines the final contract. The captain keeps in mind two questions: *what level?* and *what strain?*

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OPENING 1NT

By opening the bidding 1NT, you describe both your high-card points and your distribution to partner. The requirements for 1NT are:

- 15, 16 or 17 HCP
- A balanced hand (no singleton or void; no more than one doubleton)

OPENING BIDS OF ONE OF A SUIT

Opening a suit at the one level requires 13 to 21 total points (combining high-card points and distribution points). You need five or more cards in a major suit to open the bidding 1♥ or 1♠. You need only three cards in a minor suit to open the bidding 1♣ or 1♦.

WITH A FIVE-CARD OR LONGER SUIT

- Bid your longest suit.
- Bid the higher ranking of two five-card or six-card suits.

WITH NO FIVE-CARD OR LONGER SUIT

- Bid your longer minor suit.
- Bid the higher ranking of two four-card minor suits or the lower ranking of two three-card minor suits.

OPENER'S REBID

Opener's first bid paints a broad picture: 13 to 21 HCP and any distribution. Opener's second bid, the rebid, describes more clearly the strength and shape of the hand.

OPENER'S STRENGTH:

- Minimum hand 13 to 15 total points
- Medium hand 16 to 18 total points
- Maximum hand 19 to 21 total points

OPENER'S SHAPE:

- Balanced — No voids, no singletons and no more than one doubleton
- Unbalanced — A void, a singleton or more than one doubleton

Opener has to be aware of the bidding message responder has sent. It is signoff (don't bid any more), invitational (bid if you like) or forcing (tell me more about your hand). Most bids that responder makes after an opening bid of one of a suit are either invitational or forcing.

OPENER'S REBID AFTER AN INVITATIONAL BID

When responder raises opener's major suit to the two level:

- Pass with a minimum hand (13 to 15).
- Raise to the three level with a medium hand (16 to 18).
- Jump to game with a maximum hand (19 to 21).

When responder raises opener's minor suit to the two level:

- Pass with a minimum hand (13 to 15).
- Raise to the three level with a medium hand (16 to 18).
- Jump to 3NT with a maximum hand (19 to 21).

When responder raises opener's suit to the three level:

- Pass with a minimum hand (13 or 14).
- Bid game with 15 or more total points.

OPENER'S REBID AFTER AN INVITATIONAL BID, cont.

When responder bids 1NT:

With a minimum hand (13 to 15):

- Pass with a balanced hand.
- Bid a second suit of four cards or longer if it is lower-ranking than the original suit.
- Rebid the original suit at the two level.



With a medium hand (16 to 18):

- Bid a second suit of four cards or longer, even if it is higher ranking than the original suit.
- Rebid the original suit at the three level.

With a maximum hand (19 to 21):

- Bid 3NT with a balanced hand.
- Bid a second suit of four cards or longer, jumping a level (jump shift) if it is lower ranking than the original suit.
- Rebid the original suit, jumping to game.

OPENER'S REBID AFTER A FORCING BID (A NEW SUIT BY RESPONDER)

With a minimum hand (13 to 15) by priority:

- Raise partner's major suit to the cheapest available level with four-card support (count dummy points).
- Bid a second suit of four cards or longer if it can be bid at the one level. A suit lower-ranking than the original one can be bid at the two level.
- Rebid the original suit at the cheapest available level.
- Bid notrump at the cheapest available level with a balanced hand.

With a medium hand (16 to 18) by priority:

- Raise partner's major, jumping one level, with four-card support (count dummy points).
- Make a jump rebid in notrump (a special bid to show a balanced 18-19 HCP).
- Rebid the original suit, jumping one level.
- Bid a second suit of four cards or longer even if it is higher-ranking than the original suit and must be bid at the two level.

OPENER'S REBID AFTER A FORCING BID, cont.

With a maximum hand (19 to 21):

- Raise partner's major, jumping two levels, with four-card support (count dummy points).
- Bid a second suit of four cards or longer, jumping one level (jump shift) if it is lower-ranking than the original suit.
- Bid 3NT — a double jump suggesting a hand with a long, solid suit and stoppers in all unbid suits.
- Rebid the original suit, jumping to game.

When responder bids 2NT:

- Raise to 3NT with a balanced hand.
- Bid a second suit of four cards or longer or rebid the original suit with an unbalanced hand.

OPENING BIDS OF MORE THAN ONE

Opening 2♣ bids show a very strong hand:

- With an unbalanced hand of 22 or more total points, open the bidding at the two level with 2♣.
- With a balanced hand of 22-24 HCP, open 2♣ and rebid 2NT.

Opening notrump bids at the two and three levels:

- With a balanced hand of 20 to 21 HCP, open 2NT.
- With a balanced hand of 25 to 27 HCP, open 3NT.

Opening two level preempts:

- Two-level opening preempts (2♦, 2♥, 2♠), also known as weak twos, promise a strong six-card suit and less than 13 total points.

Opening the bidding at the three level shows:

- A long suit — usually a strong seven card suit with three of the top five honors in the suit.
- A weak hand — less than the point-count values for an opening bid (13 total points).

Opening the bidding at the four level shows:

- A long suit — usually a strong eight-card suit.
- A weak hand — less than 13 total points.

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- Responding to One of a Suit*
- Responder's Rebid*

RESPONDING TO 1NT

When opener has bid 1NT, responder is often able to determine the level and the strain of the final contract.

With 0 to 7 total points (partscore):

- Bid 2♠, 2♥ or 2♦ with a five-card or longer suit (2♣ is reserved for the Stayman convention).
- Otherwise, pass.

With 8 or 9 total points (partscore or game):

- Bid 2NT. Partner will pass with 15 HCP and bid 3NT with 16 or 17 HCP.

With 10 to 15 total points (game):

- Bid 4♠ or 4♥ with a six-card or longer major suit.
- Bid 3♠ or 3♥ with a five-card major suit. Partner will raise your suit to game with three-card or longer support. Otherwise, partner will bid 3NT.
- Bid 3NT. (2♣ can uncover an eight-card major-suit fit).

RESPONDING TO ONE OF A SUIT

Responder should have at least 6 total points to bid.

Responder's hand falls into one of the following categories:

6 to 9; 10 or 11; 12 or more

With 6 to 9 total points responding to a major suit:

- Raise to the two level with three-card support.
- Bid a new suit at the one level.
- Bid 1NT.

With 6 to 9 total points responding to a minor suit:

- Bid a new suit at the one level.
- Bid 1NT.
- Raise partner's minor suit.

With 10 or 11 total points responding to a major suit:

- Raise to the three level with three-card or longer support.
- Bid a new suit.

With 10 or 11 total points responding to a minor suit:

- Bid a new suit.
- Raise to the three level with five-card or longer support.

With 12 or more total points responding to a major or minor suit:

- Bid a new suit.
- Bid 2NT with a balanced hand and 13-15 HCP.
- Bid 3NT with a balanced hand and 16-18 HCP.

REBIDS BY RESPONDER

Responder's rebid is generally made based on the message opener has sent with the rebid. At this point, responder knows whether opener has a minimum, medium, or maximum opening bid.

With 6 to 9 total points opposite a minimum opening bid (13 to 15), think in terms of partscore. The options:

- Pass.
- Bid 1NT if the auction is still at the one level.
- Rebid at the two level a suit already mentioned by the partnership.

With 6 to 9 total points opposite a medium opening bid (16 to 18), your side may have a partscore or game depending on your strength.

With 6 or 7 total points (partscore). The options:

- Pass.
- Make the cheapest available bid of a suit already mentioned by the partnership.

With 8 or 9 total points, think of game. The options:

- Bid a Golden Game.
- Bid a new suit.

With 6 to 9 total points opposite a maximum opening bid (19 to 21), responder knows there is a game. The options:

- Pass if the partnership is already in game.
- Bid a Golden Game.
- Bid a new suit.

REBIDS BY RESPONDER, cont.

With 10 or 11 total points opposite a minimum opening bid (13 to 15), your side may have a partscore or a game. The options:

- Bid 2NT.
- Make a three-level bid of a suit already mentioned by the partnership.

With 10 or 11 points opposite a medium opening bid (16 to 18), you know your side has a game. The options:

- Bid a Golden Game.
- Bid a new suit.

With 10 or 11 total points opposite a maximum opening bid (19 to 21), you know your side has a game. The options:

- Bid a Golden Game.
- Pass if the partnership is in game.
- Bid a new suit.

With 12 or more total points opposite a minimum opening bid (13 to 15), you know your side has a game. The options:

- Bid a Golden Game.
- Bid a new suit at the three level.

With 12 or more total points opposite a medium opening bid (16 to 18), you know your side has a game. The options:

- Bid a Golden Game.
- Bid a new suit.

With 12 or more total points opposite a maximum opening bid (19 to 21), you know your side has a slam. The options:

- Bid the appropriate slam.

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OVERCALLS AND ADVANCING OF OVERCALLS

When an opponent opens the bidding, you can compete by overcalling in a suit if your hand meets the following requirements:

- A five-card or longer suit. (Try to have a six-card suit to overcall at the two level.)
- 8 to 16 HCP (10 to 17 total points).

If your partner overcalls in a suit, you may advance the contract by raising or bidding a new suit:

With a minimum hand (8 or 9 total points):

- Show support for partner with a raise.
- Bid a new suit at the one level with no support and a good five-card suit of your own.

With a limit raise or better hand (10 or 11+ total points):

- Bid a new suit at the two level with no support for partner's overcall and a good five-card suit of your own.
- Make a cuebid to describe a limit raise hand with support for partner's overcall and then:
 1. Stop below game in the appropriate partscore if partner shows less than an opening hand with the rebid.
 2. Bid game if partner shows more than the minimum overcall by bidding another suit.
- Bid game if you have enough total points opposite a minimum overcall.

If your partner overcalls in a suit, you may advance the

OVERCALLS AND ADVANCING, cont.

contract by bidding notrump if you have strength in the opponent's suit, no fit for partner and no suit of your own.

- Bid 1NT with 8-11 HCP
- Bid 2NT with 12-15 HCP
- Bid 3NT with 16+ HCP

When an opponent opens the bidding, you can compete by overcalling 1NT if your hand meets the following requirements:

- 15 to 18 HCP.
- Balanced hand.
- Some strength in the opponent's suit.

Advancing after your partner overcalls 1NT:

0 to 7 total points

- Bid 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠ with a five-card or longer suit (2♣ is reserved for the Stayman convention).
- Pass.

8 or 9 total points

- Bid 2NT (2♣ can be used to uncover an eight-card major-suit fit.)

10 to 15 total points

- Bid 4♥ or 4♠ with a six-card or longer suit.
- Bid 3♥ or 3♠ with a five-card suit. Partner will raise to game in your suit with three-card or longer support or rebid 3NT.
- Bid 3NT (2♣ can be used to uncover an eight-card major suit fit).

TAKEOUT DOUBLES AND ADVANCES

One way to compete when an opponent opens the bidding is to make a takeout double. Here are three guidelines to help you determine if a double is for takeout:

1. Neither the doubler nor the doubler's partner have previously made a bid (previous passes are okay).
2. The opposing partnership has bid either one or two suits (notrump is not a suit).
3. It is either the doubler's first or second turn to bid.

To make a takeout double, you must have one of the following:

- 13 to 17 total points with at least three-card support for all unbid suits.
- Any hand with 18 or more total points, that is, a hand too strong to overcall.

If your partner makes a takeout double, pass is not an option unless responder makes a call other than "Pass" OR you have length and strength in the opponent's suit. You advance the bidding as follows:

With a minimum hand (0 to 8 total points):

- Bid a four-card or longer major suit at the cheapest level.
- Bid a four-card or longer minor suit at the cheapest level.

With a medium hand (9 to 11 total points):

- Jump in a four-card or longer major suit.
- Jump in a four-card or longer minor suit.

TAKEOUT DOUBLES AND ADVANCES, cont.

With a maximum hand (12 or more total points):

- Jump to game in a four-card or longer major suit.
- Cuebid the opponents' suit to ask doubler for assistance in finding the best game contract.

Notrump advances to partner's takeout double:

- 1NT shows 8-10 HCP and at least one stopper in the opponent's suit.
- 2NT shows 11-12 HCP and at least one stopper in the opponent's suit.
- 3NT shows 13 or more HCP with at least one stopper in the opponent's suit.

After you have made a takeout double and your partner has advanced the bidding, how do you rebid?

With a minimum hand (13 to 15 total points):

- Pass if partner bid at the cheapest level.
- Pass with 13 or 14 total points if partner jumps a level.
- Invite a Golden Game with 15 total points if partner jumps a level.

With a medium hand (16 to 18 total points):

- Raise one level if partner bids at the cheapest level.
- Bid a Golden Game if partner jumps a level.

With a maximum hand (19 to 21 total points):

- Jump raise if partner bids at the cheapest level.
- Bid a Golden Game if partner jumps a level.

THE STAYMAN CONVENTION

When partner opens the bidding 1NT, you can respond 2♣ (the Stayman convention) if you have 8 or more total points:

- to find out if opener has a four-card major suit, or
- to show an invitational hand with a five-card major.

Opener rebids as follows:

- 2♦ — No four-card major
- 2♥ — Shows a four-card heart suit and may have four spades.
- 2♠ — Shows a four-card spade suit and denies four hearts.

Responder rebids with an invitational hand and 8 or 9 total points, holding four or more cards in a major:

- 2NT If opener denies a four-card major by bidding 2♦,
- 2NT if opener responds in the “other” four-card major,
- 3 of a major, inviting to game, if opener responds in the “correct” four-card major. (Partner will pass with a minimum and bid game with a maximum.)
- 3 of a major holding a five-card suit.

Responder rebids with a game-forcing hand, 10 or more total points and at least one four-card major or better:

- 4♥ or 4♠ when opener shows four cards in the same major by bidding 3♥ or 3♠.
- 3NT when opener denies a four-card major.

SLAM BIDDING

At the slam level, the number of tricks required is the same for every strain – 12 for a small slam and 13 for a grand slam.

Slam can be played in any Golden Fit or notrump.

A contract played in a Golden Fit often produces one more trick than one played in notrump.

When considering a slam, use the following guidelines:

- 33 or more total points: Bid a small slam in a Golden Fit or in notrump.
- 37 or more total points: Bid a grand slam in a Golden Fit or in notrump.

THE BLACKWOOD CONVENTION

A convention is a bid which players have agreed to treat as sending or receiving a message unrelated to the suit or notrump named in the bid.

Blackwood uses the bid of 4NT to ask partner how many aces partner holds. The responses are conventional:

5♣ = 0 or 4 aces

5♦ = 1 ace

5♥ = 2 aces

5♠ = 3 aces

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DECLARER'S PLAN

PAUSE TO CONSIDER YOUR OBJECTIVES

For most players, the play is the most exciting part of the game. Before you play a card after the opening lead, you should consider your objectives — how many tricks do you need to fulfill your contract? There is a different focus on this question depending on whether you are playing in a suit contract or a notrump contract.

NOTRUMP CONTRACT:

The focus should be on how many tricks, or winners, you need. In a contract of 3NT, you need nine winners.

SUIT CONTRACT:

Consider your objective from the point of losers, the number of tricks you can afford to lose. In a contract of 4♠, you can afford three losers.

LOOK AT YOUR WINNERS AND LOSERS

Counting winners:

Winners are sure tricks, those you can take without giving up the lead. Let's look at two suits:

Dummy:	5 4 3 2	5 4 3
Declarer:	A K Q J	K Q J 10

The suit on the left has four sure tricks — the ace, the king, the queen and the jack — without giving up the lead.

The suit on the right has no tricks without giving up the lead to the ace. This suit has no sure tricks.

Counting losers:

Counting losers is usually more challenging than counting winners. Focus on your (declarer's) holding in each suit, but look at dummy to see if any high cards can help out. Then add up all of the losers in the two suits.

Dummy:	K Q J	Q 10 4
Declarer:	9 4 2	J 6 3

The suit on the left, with dummy's help, has only one loser, the ace. The suit on the right has two losers, the ace and the king.

Some losers are quick, as in the two examples above. Other losers are slow, such as having A-K-2 opposite 6-5-4 in dummy. You have no immediate losers, but you will have an eventual loser in the suit.

ANALYZE YOUR ALTERNATIVES

After completing the first two steps, you know what your objectives are and how far you are from reaching them. What are your alternatives?

In notrump:

- Promoting high cards.
- Developing long suits.
- Finessing (leading toward a high card).

In a suit:

- Ruffing losers in dummy.
- Discarding losers on winners or established winners.

NOW PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Avoid temptation. If you have reached your goal (nine winners in 3NT), don't jeopardize your contract.

Avoid stranding a suit. If you have the K-5 in your hand and the A-Q-J-10-9 in dummy, don't play the ace first and then the king. You may end up in the wrong hand to take the rest of your tricks. Play the high card from the short side first — in this case, the king.

Avoid letting the opponents ruff your good cards. "Get the kiddies off the street" by drawing trumps before cashing your aces and kings.

DEFENSE

OPENING LEADS

Against a notrump contract:

Lead your longest suit to establish winners through length — fourth best if your suit is broken or the top of a sequence of three cards headed by an honor.

If partner has bid a suit, lead it:

- Lead the top card from a doubleton.
- Lead the top of touching honors.
- With no sequence, lead low.

Against a suit contract:

Lead partner's suit if partner has bid. Other possible leads are:

- The ace from an ace-king combination.
- The top card from a sequence, such as K-Q-J or J-10-9-5.
- An unbid suit. Don't be afraid of leading away from an honor if you wish to establish some high cards for winners.
- A trump, if you think declarer is going to ruff some losers in dummy.
- A singleton or doubleton, hoping to score a trump trick in your hand.

SECOND-HAND PLAY

When declarer leads a low card from hand or from dummy and you are the second person to play to the trick, a useful guideline is second hand low. Your partner will play last to the trick, and you do not want to waste your high cards capturing only low cards from declarer.

There are exceptions:

- You do not want to play a low card if it will allow declarer to win a trick too cheaply. With a strong holding in the suit, you may need to play one of your honors.
- You do not want to play second hand low if by playing high you could defeat the contract.

If declarer leads a high card, you should generally cover an honor with an honor. You should do this only if it is likely to promote a trick for your side. If declarer leads from touching high cards in the dummy, you should generally wait to cover the last high card led.

THIRD-HAND PLAY

When your partner leads to a trick and you are the third person to play to the trick, a useful guideline is third hand high. You are the last player on your side to contribute a card, and you want to try to win the trick for your side if possible. If your card does not win the trick, it may promote winners in your partner's hand.

You need to play as high a card as necessary to try to win the trick. With a choice of equal (touching) cards, play the lowest. If partner leads a high card that will win the trick, you do not need to play a higher card.

When deciding how high a card it is necessary to play as third hand, try to keep the opponents' high cards trapped whenever possible. If dummy has the J-4 and you have the Q-10, cover the jack with the queen. However, if the 4 is played from dummy, you should play the 10.

DEFENSIVE SIGNALS

The defenders try to communicate information about their strength and distribution through the use of defensive signals. The types of signals the defenders can use, in order of priority, are:

- **Attitude signal** — when you want to tell partner whether or not you like a particular suit, a high card is an encouraging signal and a low card is a discouraging signal. “Liking” a suit means you hold high cards in the suit and/or you wish partner to lead the suit.
- **Count signal** — when you want to tell partner how many cards you hold in a suit, a high card followed by a low card shows an even number, and a low card followed by a high card shows an odd number.
- **Suit preference signal** — when partner has a choice of leading one of two suits, a high card shows preference for the higher-ranking suit and a low card shows preference for the lower-ranking suit.

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How to Win Points

How to Value Tricks

Bonuses, Overtricks, Penalties

HOW TO KEEP SCORE

HOW TO WIN POINTS

At the end of the play of a deal, points can be earned in three ways:

- Trick score for fulfilling a contract.
- Bonus(es) for fulfilling a special contract.
- Penalty for defeating the opponents' contract.

HOW TO VALUE TRICKS

TRICK SCORE:

20 points per trick in clubs or diamonds (minor suits).

30 points per trick in hearts or spades (major suits).

40 points for the first trick and 30 points for each subsequent trick in notrump.

Twice the trick score for doubled contracts.

Four times the trick score for redoubled contracts.

BONUSES, OVERTRICKS, PENALTIES

BONUS POINTS	NOT VULNERABLE	VULNERABLE
Partscore	50	50
Game	300	500
Small Slam	500	750
Grand Slam	1000	1500
Making a doubled contract	50	50
Making a redoubled contract	100	100

OVERTRICKS	NOT VULNERABLE	VULNERABLE
Undoubled	Trick score	Trick score
Doubled	100 per trick	200 per trick
Redoubled	200 per trick	400 per trick

PENALTIES	NOT VULNERABLE	VULNERABLE
Undoubled	50 per undertrick	100 per undertrick
Doubled	100 first undertrick	200 first undertrick
	200 next two undertricks	300 additional undertricks
	300 additional undertricks	
Redoubled	200 first undertrick	400 first undertrick
	400 next two undertricks	600 additional undertricks
	600 additional undertricks	



The **ACBL Bridge Series** is a comprehensive lesson plan which takes students from absolute beginners to confident players. Each of the five volumes consists of a teacher's manual, textbook and coded cards which enable players to quickly deal out hands to match the lessons in the textbooks. Pocket-sized spiral bound booklets (like the one in your hand) are also available for the first three books in the series. These "flippers" summarize the information and serve as a guide while playing or for review.

- Volume One:** Club Series—Bidding in the 21st Century
- Volume Two:** Diamond Series—Play of the Hand in the 21st Century
- Volume Three:** Heart Series—Defense in the 21st Century
- Volume Four:** Spade Series—Commonly Used Conventions in the 21st Century
- Volume Five:** Notrump Series—More Commonly Used Conventions in the 21st Century

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